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ABSTRACT

Although Ontario's Ministry of Education and Training has been overseen by two different parties since 1995, the direction for education in the province has been steady. An overview of two bills that are guiding education reform, Bill 104 and Bill 160, and their financial implications is presented. Bill 104, the Fewer School Boards Act, purports to improve the accountability, effectiveness, and quality of Ontario's school system. It gives government the regulatory power to establish new school boards, to name the boards, to determine the number of trustees for each board, and to make other changes. Bill 160, entitled the Education Quality Improvement Act, altered other acts and provided for reforms in education governance, education finance, and education labor relations. The latter bill prompted the teachers' federation to threaten a provincewide strike if Bill 160's recommendations for class size, teaching times, budget cuts, and other issues passed unchanged. The reforms have raised many questions regarding educational finances and have angered teachers and parents. But the acts conform to the government's move to centralize resources and to focus on the equality of education funding as opposed to the equity of education funding. An example of the government's Foundation Grant for Education is provided in an appendix. (RJM)

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STATE OF THE STATE – ONTARIO

by

Anne L. Jefferson, Ph.D.[1]

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EA 029 421

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Anne L. Jefferson, Ph.D.[1]

The Province of Ontario has been engaged in a number of contemplated changes since 1995. These considered changes have extended into all aspects of the education system and have been the focus for the Ministry of Education and Training for two separate governments. The first government represented the New Democratic Party, a social political party. The second and present government is represented by the Conservative Party, a right-wing political party.

Although the political mandates of the two governments appear to oppose each other, it is interesting to note that the direction being set for education has continued under both governments. The like mindedness of the governments is reflective in the fact that the Education Improvement Commission established by the Conservative Minister of Education and Training for the implementation of education reform is co-chaired by the former New Democratic Minister of Education and Training and the former chair of the Metro Toronto School Board. The education reforms that are occurring are guided by two bills; Bill 104 and Bill 160.

Bill 104, *Fewer School Boards Act, 1997*, is an Act to improve the accountability, effectiveness and quality of Ontario's school system by permitting a reduction in the number of school boards, establishing an Education Improvement Commission to oversee the transition to the new system, and addresses the eligibility for election to the new boards. The existing 129 major school boards in Ontario will be replaced by 66 new "District Boards" effective January 1, 1998. The 37 existing isolate and hospital boards will be maintained as school authorities. The number of trustees will be cut from almost 1,900 to approximately 700. Trustees will no longer receive up to the equivalent of a full-time salary. School boards will have the option of providing trustees an honorarium of up to $5,000 per year. School board employees and their spouses will not be able to serve as trustees in any school board or school authority in Ontario; employees must take a leave of absence without pay if they run for office. If elected, the individual must resign from the employing school board.

The legislation gives government the regulatory power to establish the new school boards, to name the boards, to determine the number of trustees for each board, to determine the geographic boundaries for election purposes within the boards, to determine the nomination procedures and the duties to be performed by municipal clerks and the newly created Education Improvement Commission.

Bill 160, *Education Quality Improvement Act, 1997*, amends the *Education Act* and makes consequential amendments to other Acts, to provide for reforms in education governance,

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[1]Dr. Jefferson is an expert in school finance and has spoken at numerous conferences in Canada, United States, Australia, and Europe as well as published extensively in the area.

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education finance, and education labour relations. The Bill also addresses matters related to instruction in Ontario's schools.

The teaching federations' threaten a province-wide strike if the government did not withdraw Bill 160 or at least make specified changes to it. The response from the government was to change the portfolio of the Minister of Education and Training. The new Minister was cautiously welcomed by the teaching federations; that is, they were still insistence on the withdrawal or significant changes to Bill 160. No progress was made with respect to these demands. On October 27, 1997, the teachers took their positions to the picket line.

Eight main issues were at the center of the dispute.[2]

"(1) Class sizes: The province wants to set the size of classes, as well as the method for determining those sizes. Teachers want class sizes to be decided through collective bargaining."

"(2) Teaching times: The province wants to set minimum amounts of instructional time and maximum amounts of preparation time and professional development days. The teachers do not want these times set by the province. They want more classroom time through increased funding and staffing."

"(3) Budget cuts: Teachers want a guarantee there will be no further cuts to the $14 billion education budget."

"(4) Preparation for the school year: The province wants the power to require or authorize school boards to require teachers to work during some or all of the five working days before the start of the school year. The teachers want such preparation time to remain voluntary."

"(5) Central authority: The province wants more power to set the school year, school terms and school holidays, and wants more regulation-making authority relating to instructional days, examinations days and professional activity days. The teachers believe the province has enough authority over these issues under current legislation."

"(6) Uncertified teachers: The province wants the power to allow people without teaching certificates to teach some courses, such as physical education and computer science. The teachers do not want non-certified people to teach in classrooms."

"(7) Tax collections: The province wants to collect education taxes and redistribute them to school boards on a per student basis. The teachers want taxes to continue to be collected at a local level, so that boards can fund programs deemed essential at a local level, such as conflict resolution and anti-racism education, or subsidize programs such as junior kindergarten and adult education."

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[2] "Bill 160: the issues", *Ottawa Citizen*, October 23, 1977, pp. A1-A2.

"(8) Regulatory power: The province wants the power to make regulations, during the period of school system reforms, to prevent disruption in students' education. The teachers want this clause rewritten or deleted, because they feel it would give the province the power to limit or curtail the unions' right to strike, a right that Bill 160 otherwise expressly preserves. If this is not the government's intent, teachers say, this clause should be rewritten."

November 10, 1997 the teachers returned to the classroom. The government had closed debate on Bill 160 after losing its bid to get a court injunction against the political protest of the teachers. The process resulted in the professional organizations becoming even more alienated then they had been toward government reform. Nevertheless, the government proceeded with its plans and school boards, schools, teachers, and parents are struggling with the new expectations that the changes bring.

Of concern to this paper is what does all of this mean in terms of the financial resources that will or will not be available to the system. An important shift in the rationale for financial resources is the focus on "putting more resources in the classroom"[3]. The Ministry claims:

> "To ensure a smooth transition, Ontario will invest more than $13 billion a year – the same as last year – in the province's education system right through to the end of the 1997-98 school year. The new way of funding should be in place when students return to school in September 1998."[4]

In essence, 1996 and 1997 have been transition years. January 1, 1998, the new version of the Ontario education system took full effect. However, since funding is based on the school year, the new approach to funding the education system was delayed until the start of the 1998-99 school year. Wednesday, March 25, 1998 Education Minister Dave Johnson finally announced how schools would be funded. The new funding model, student-focused funding formula, stabilizes funding for a three-year period.

There were a number of issues that the government had to attend to in the development of the new funding structure. One politically sensitive issue was the admission by the government (as a result of the teachers' political protest) that they were seeking to reduce the funding for education in the amount of $500 to $700 million. This was an admission completely opposite from their public position prior to the political protest. So how was this issue dealt with. Education and Training Minister Johnson in announcing the new student-focused funding formula stated:

> "Classroom spending will increase from 61 per cent to 65 per cent of total

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[3]Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, "Putting students first: Ontario's plan for education reform", 1997, p.1 (http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/brochure/tabloid/tabloid.html)

[4]Ibid, p.6

education spending. This will mean an increase of $583 million by the year 2000. Education funding will remain stable at over $13 billion for each of the next three years. When combined with current pension contributions, this will total $14.4 billion in 1998/99. As I indicated earlier, it is in the area of non-classroom spending that school boards will be expected to find efficiencies and reduce waste. Non-classroom spending includes Board Administration, Department Heads, Directors and Supervisory officers, and Custodial and Maintenance. More importantly, in every board in Ontario – for all 72 boards – funds allocated for classroom spending will increase."[5]

The school boards, especially the wealthy boards, have claimed that the funding will result in school closures, program loss, and teacher layoffs. The actual scenario that will play out will become known over the next three years. Nevertheless, school board budgetary decisions for the 1998-99 school year indicate that the forecasted result is quickly becoming a reality. To assist board's in the restructuring process required under Bill 104, the government is providing transition and restructuring assistance of $385 million. Details for accessing funds have yet to be released.

In the words of the Minister, the "new approach to funding means more tax dollars will be directed to the classroom"[6]. He defined classroom expenses to include classroom teachers and their assistants, classroom supplies such as textbooks, pencils, paper, computers, and library and Guidance teachers. See Appendix 1 for specific details.

The new student-focused funding model replaces the thirty-four different types of grants in 1997 with eleven.

1. Foundation Grant to provide for the core education of every student
2. Special Education Grant – a two-part grant. The first part provides flexible funding to meet the needs of most exceptional students, while the second part addresses the needs of specific students who require specialized high-cost assistance
3. Language Grant – to support a range of programs to help students learn the language of their classroom or a second language
4. Early Learning Grant – to support school boards' initiates to design early learning programs that best meet the needs of children in their communities
5. Learning Opportunities Grant – to support a range of programs designed to help students

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[5]Ontario Education and Training Minister Dave Johnson, Speaking notes for the announcement of Ontario's new student-focused approach to funding education, March 25, 1998. (http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/nr/98.03/speak.html)

[6]Ontario Education and Training Minister Dave Johnson, Speaking notes for the announcement of Ontario's new student-focused approach to funding education, March 25, 1998. (http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/nr/98.03/speak.html)

who are at greater risk of academic failure because of their social and economic situations

6. Geographic and School Authorities Grant – to offset additional costs faced by boards covering rural and remote areas, boards operating small schools or serving sparse student populations, and school authorities
7. Teacher Compensation Grant – to offset funds required by school boards with a high percentage of older, higher paid teachers
8. Adult and Continuing Education Grant – to support education for adults 21 and over including credit courses leading to an Ontario Secondary School Diploma and non- credit second-language training in English or French; this grant also funds summer school for secondary school students and International-languages instruction (often called "Heritage Languages")
9. Transportation Grant – to support the cost for bussing and other student transportation. In the future, boards will be expected to reduce funding for buses by developing joint busing services with other boards.
10. School Board Administration and Governance Grant – to pay for the cost of trustees, directors and supervisory officers, and central administration of school boards. Boards are expected to sharply curtail spending. This Grant is 29 per cent less than 1997.
11. Pupil Accommodation Grant – to offset cost for building new schools; operating and maintenance costs (heating, lighting, cleaning); repairs and renovations; and capital debt servicing

In summary, the financial outlook for education in Ontario remains a question mark. What is certain is that the government is centralizing the resources and this move is in agreement with happenings within other provincial jurisdictions. However, in Ontario there is a significant difference in its approach from that of other provinces. The difference lies in Ontario focus on the equality of education funding as opposed to equity of education funding. This is an important shift and could potential result in inequities for children across the province. The mandate of the present government is subject to renewal at the polls in two years. Whether they are able to secure a second mandate is never a guarantee and their current actions will make it a political challenge. At the moment, a teaching force of 126,000 that is angry and a public that is upset and or confused about just what is happening in education does not make the path of reelection an easy one.

APPENDIX 1

(http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/nr/98.03/foundfs.html)

Fact Sheet Ministry of Education and Training

Foundation Grant

March 25, 1998

The Foundation Grant covers the basic costs of providing an educational program to a student for one school year. It will be allocated to district school boards on a per student basis. The Foundation Grant will be the same regardless of where a board is located in Ontario.

Since it costs more to provide secondary education, the Foundation Grant for a secondary school student is higher than the Foundation Grant for an elementary student.

The Foundation Grant does not include the additional costs associated with a student's special needs, which will be funded by other grants (the Learning Opportunities Grant, the Special Education Grant, and the Language Grant).

Parents and taxpayers will know exactly what expenditures the grant is meant to cover.

CLASSROOM

classroom teachers	salaries and benefits for certified classroom teachers, supply teachers, and staff development
teacher assistants	salaries and benefits for staff who support certified teachers in the classroom, primarily in Junior Kindergarten and Kindergarten
textbooks & learning materials	textbooks, workbooks, equipment, computer software, library books and resource materials
classroom supplies	other classroom supplies, including paper, pens and pencils, and art materials classroom computers, computer hardware,
library and guidance services	salaries and benefits for school librarians and guidance counsellors
professional and paraprofessional support	salaries and benefits for a variety of staff providing support services to students and teachers, e.g. psychologists, speech therapists, social workers, attendance counsellors, and child/youth workers

NON-CLASSROOM

preparation time	salaries and benefits for additional teachers so that teachers are able to spend time away from the classroom for lesson preparation, marking, and meeting parents and students
teacher consultants	salaries and benefits for teacher consultants who provide teachers with advice about programs and student needs, e.g. reading specialists, science specialists, and specialists in conflict resolution
school administration	salaries and benefits for principals, vice-principals, department heads and school secretaries; costs of school office supplies

The Foundation Grant for 1998-99

For the 1998-99 school year the Foundation Grant will be $3,367 for each elementary school student and $3,953 for each secondary school student. This is the breakdown for each component of the grant:

Elementary	*$/ Student*	*Secondary*	*$/Student*
classroom teacher (class size: 25:1)	2331	classroom teacher (class size: 22:1)	2362
teacher assistants	5	teacher assistants	0
textbooks and learning materials	75	textbooks and learning materials	100
classroom supplies	77	classroom supplies	173
classroom computers	43	classroom computers	56
library and guidance	82	library and guidance	208
professionals and paraprofessionals	65	professionals and paraprofessionals	102
preparation time	227	preparation time	458
teacher consultants	37	teacher consultants	42
school administration	425	school administration	452
TOTAL GRANT	**3367**	**TOTAL GRANT**	**3953**

The Foundation Grant will be $7.0 billion in 1998-99.